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Securing a spot under the sun? Gas and renewables in the EU-Russian energy transition discourse

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ABSTRACT

By analysing natural gas as a transitional fuel to renewables in the EU-Russian discourse, this article addresses energy cooperation in the International Gas Union (IGU) and geopolitics of energy transition within the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA). The understanding of the institutional setting is based on a constructivist approach. It is argued that the structure of the international organisation influences the rules of the game and the behaviour of the actors can be anticipated within the structure. Thus, sovereignty and geopolitical debates prevail in the intergovernmental institution, while a market-oriented discourse dominates in the non-governmental organisation. Nord Stream 2 is used as a case to test the impact of the norms "gas as a back-up fuel" for renewables and "reliability of supply" in the energy transition debate.

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Global energy governance; energy transition; non-state actors; EU; Russia

1. Introduction

By moving beyond state-centrism, this article addresses the question of whether there is a clash of values and norms or coherence of shared interests in relation to similar values and norms regarding the energy transition process between the European Union (EU) and the Russian Federation. The paper explores their energy transition discourse in two institutional settings, namely the International Gas Union (IGU) and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

The analysis develops in four steps which are presented in the four sub-sections. Following the introduction, the second section of this article will discuss how norms and values are defined and discussed in relation to the framework of analysis based on actors, structures and processes. Section three concentrates on general normative positions in the IGU and IRENA. In particular, the question of how the gas industry is addressing its survival in a future of renewables by "securing its spot under the sun" in the decarbonisation agenda of the Paris Agreement is investigated.

In Section 4, the analysis is deepened by including results of the author's research findings from interviews with the energy experts. The purpose of this section is to establish

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the dominant norms in the EU-Russian energy transition discourse. The norms of "gas as a back-up fuel" and "reliability of supply" are further tested in the case of Nord Stream 2 (Section 5). This case illustrates the challenges of the international gas industry, that is "to speak with one voice" in accordance with the ever-increasing deployment of renewable energy and gradual phase-out of fossil fuels.

In the conclusion the author returns to the main question of whether the behaviour of actors is determined by the structure of the organisation according to the framework of analysis applied in the theoretical section of this article.

The article will begin by briefly looking at the situation that the global gas industry is facing today in light of the fundamental changes taking place within the energy systems worldwide. The main concern for the gas industry is how gas can occupy a substantial part in the future energy mix while global energy markets are in the process of transition. The gas industry is currently facing a challenge in convincing the international community that gas assumes a key role as a transitional fuel towards achieving a low carbon world economy.

Meeting the climate targets set by the Paris Agreement (of keeping the temperature rises to "well below 2 degrees Celsius" and limiting temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius) will cause significant implications for traditional fossil fuels that are to be replaced by more affordable and available renewables. Therefore, decentralised renewable energy systems – wind, solar, hydro, geothermal and biomass – will considerably influence the international gas and oil markets. As the International Energy Agency (IEA) predicts, renewables and natural gas will take the lead, while the demand for oil and coal will decrease over the next twenty years (IEA, World Energy Outlook 2017, 1). For example, the coal phase-out perspective will make natural gas one of the leading sources of electricity. Moreover, "climate-change policies may encourage greater use of gas in the next five to 10 years, if not for longer". (Stevens 2016, 23–25).

A number of scholars have already addressed the energy transition debate and geopolitics (Bosman and Scholten 2013; CIEP 2014; Criekemans 2018; De Ridder 2013; Dreyer 2013; Kostyuk, Makarov, and Mitrova 2012; Scholten 2018; Scholten and Bosman 2016, etc.). Among the issues analysed, the following concerns were addressed: how renewables may or may not reduce geopolitical tensions, how they can stimulate regional cooperation, how a field of renewables is less politicised than a debate on the use of fossil fuels, how energy transition will impact a balance of power and how renewables will lead to decentralised and multipolar actors.

The decision to use the IGU as a case study was motivated by the fact that this non-governmental organisation (NGO) represents the oldest network of members of the gas industry in the world and is regarded as "a voice of gas industry" since the 1930s (IGU 2012, 12). Russian and European gas firms have been active for almost a century in this organisation in which they first had to defend their industry from the competition of the coal industry, and nowadays they must face global market challenges from the renewable energy companies. The IGU's activities provide a good example of a de-politicisation of the European energy debate as its members "talk" business irrespective of the political and geopolitical climate of the Cold War, the post-Cold War environment and the recently implemented reciprocal sanctions between the EU and Russia with regard to growing geopolitical tensions.

In contrast, IRENA presents an interesting case study because it is a relatively new intergovernmental organisation (IGO) and, to a certain extent, a product of a re-politicised

renewable energy. Governments need to address the challenges presented by the growing renewable energy industry and incorporate the issues of climate change into their political agendas. The representatives of both the renewable energy and gas production industries have tried to convince the governments of the need for their existence in the low-carbon energy systems and are in particular lobbying for governmental subsidies in order to secure the future of their respective industries.

While the IGU and its members attempt to stay out of politics, members of IRENA are becoming increasingly involved in the re-politicisation of the energy transition process. The author's understanding of the institutional setting is based on a social constructivist theoretical approach whereby "social actors do not only act rationally according to their selfish interests … but also in response to shared values and norms" (Rittberger, Zangl, and Kruck 2012, 27). Global energy governance provides an institutionalised framework in which actors promote not only their interests but also their norms, values and principles. On the global multilateral level, cooperation between the EU and Russia may reduce tensions and antagonisms, which are currently centred on the geopolitical sovereignty-based discourse; most notably, in the context of the crisis between Russia and Ukraine.

2. Theoretical and methodological framework

This article draws inspiration from a tripartite pragmatist ontological model that comprises actors, structures of corporate practice and processes (Franke and Roos 2010, 1057). The model consists of the following elements: structures of corporate practice such as states, supra or international organisations; and human beings as sole actors and processes understood as the dialectical interrelation between those structures and actors.

By incorporating some of the above-mentioned elements of a theoretical framework centred on the structure versus agency debate that was given a new impetus by Franke and Roos (2010), two international energy organisations the IGU and IRENA are presented in this article as *structures of corporate practice*. The *actors* in this model include governmental and non-governmental institutions.

The *processes* are defined as the dialectical interrelation between these *structures* and *actors* and represent energy transition debates; in particular, norms of "gas as a back-up for renewables" and "reliability of gas supply". The characteristics of both structures and actors change over time because of their interrelation and internal power structures within said structures.

It should be considered that this theoretical framework as well as the structure versus agency debate, which has been further developed by the aforementioned authors, has significant limitations and cannot fully address the issue of social change. In particular, the model by U. Franke and U. Roos (like any other theoretical model) is rather static and more of a simplification of the institutionalised setting (in this case) that is unable to entirely reflect its dynamics.

In this article, the author has applied the method of qualitative interviewing that incorporates elements of semi-structured interviews with energy experts who are representatives of the IGU and IRENA. The interviews with the energy experts from both organisations conducted in the period of June 2017 – March 2018 serve as primary sources for this study and contribute to providing a more nuanced picture of the functionality of these organisations.

Energy security and energy transition narratives between the EU and Russia are predominantly explored from a social constructivist perspective. Therefore, it is important to make sense of the changing meanings of their discourse and to focus on the problems that have arisen between the EU and Russia. The author observes that both actors try to communicate their meanings of values, norms and principles that underline their cooperation in the institutional setting and create obstacles in the geopolitical setting. Speaking of the return of norms to the theory of International Relations, M. Finnemore and K, Sikkink define norms as "a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity" (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891). This study analyses the EU-Russian discourse outlined by cooperation and competition/rivalry between gas and renewable industries within the framework of international energy institutions. As such, gas is a cleaner and more environmentally friendly alternative to other fossil fuels (especially coal).

Figure 1 depicts the institutionalised settings in which the IGU and IRENA are regarded as *structures of corporate practice*. The actors in this model are represented by member states – the EU, Russia (in case of IRENA) as well as European energy firms (as non-state actors) and Gazprom as members of the IGU. The energy transition debate that is centred on the norms of "gas a back-up fuel for renewables" and "reliability of gas supply" represents *processes* that are defined as the dialectical interrelation between the *structures* and *actors*.

As the author argues, these processes *can* be observed. The values and norms observed in these processes reflect the actors and the structures. They also provide a basis for the preferences of actors and structure in general.

Within these structures, the Secretariats of the IGU and IRENA are also considered actors. The members of the International Gas Union are Associate and Chartered members such as Gazprom, Gasterra, etc. The member states of IRENA as an IGO are the main actors. However, IRENA cooperates not only with governments that are represented through the Ministries of Energy, Economy or Foreign Affairs but also with think tanks, research institutes, universities, companies in the field of renewables, the European Commission, etc. The private sector is represented through renewable energy associations.

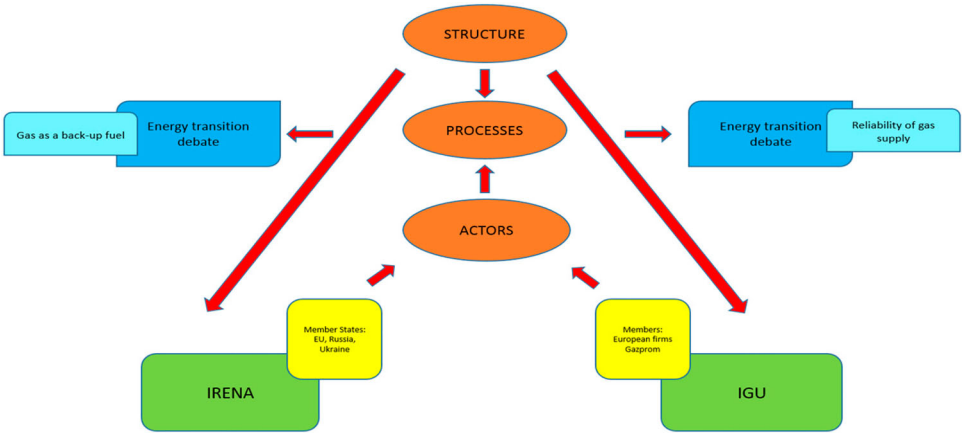

Figure 1. Institutionalised settings.

Thus, Figure 1 depicts an institutionalised context for cooperation, conflict and competition between members of both international energy organisations, i.e. the IGU and IRENA. In the next section the article further elaborates on the aforementioned international energy organisations, the norms and values they represent, the role of state and non-state members and their perception of the energy transition process.

3. The IGU and IRENA: general normative positions

The IGU, positioning itself as an independent non-profit organisation, was founded in 1931 and includes 91 Charter members (industry's major gas companies) and 51 Associate members (national gas associations) in 91 countries. These members include European gas companies, namely ENGIE, Gas Natural Fenosa**,** STATOIL ASA, Royal Dutch Shell, TOTAL S.A and UNIPER. Russia's state-owned Gazprom is listed as an IGU Charter Member. The IGU Associate members are N.V. Nederlandse Gasunie and Gasterra (two companies based in Groningen, the Netherlands), VOPAK LNG Holding BV (also based in the Netherlands), ENI (Italy), Sonorgás (Portugal), Russian Gas Society, Spetsneftegaz NPO JSC, etc.

The IGU is currently headquartered in Barcelona, Spain and represents around 95% of the global gas markets. It promotes a global vision for gas as a sustainable energy source that can improve the quality of human lives by providing a cleaner environment, more safety, stability and prosperity in the world. Furthermore, it is active in global energy politics and diplomacy that includes, for example, G20 Energy Sustainability Working Group meetings.

According to the *2009–2012 Triennium Work Report* "Geopolitics and Natural Gas" that was sponsored by KVGN, Gazprom, Chevron and ENI, the IGU has the potential

> to make a more active and visible contribution to the global energy community, in particular towards the political stakeholders and policymaking arenas … . the diversity of its constituency across the entire value chain legitimizes -and at times may also constrain – the IGU's ability to act as a voice for the industry. (CIEP/IGU 2012)

Thus, the IGU is facing a challenge in terms of securing a significant role for natural gas in the process of energy transition amid global concerns about climate change, continuing falling costs of renewables and growing capacities of new storage technologies.

Besides the IGU in which European and Russian gas industries work together and promote their shared interests related to similar values and norms, this article also focuses on the EU-Russian cooperation in IRENA.

IRENA, an intergovernmental organisation, was established in 2009 and its headquarters are located in Masdar City, Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates, but also has the Innovation and Technology Center in Bonn, Germany. Between 2011 (64 members) and 2018 (157 members), IRENA membership has almost tripled and there are currently 26 states in possession of accession status. The EU is listed as a separate member and it was not until 2015 that the Russian Federation joined the organisation.

It is worth mentioning that IRENA brings together not only member states but also the private sector and civil society to advocate accelerated deployment of renewable energy technologies. The leading European countries behind the establishment of IRENA were Germany, Denmark and Spain, which all had "strong corporate interests in the renewable

energy sector", in particular companies that were world market leaders of the wind turbine manufacturing at the time of the creation of the organisation such as Vestas, Gamesa, Enercon, Siemens, Nordex, Repower, Acciona (van de Graaf 2013, 27).

According to the energy scholars, IRENA has "emerged out of the dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of interest for renewable energies within the IEA" (IEA – International Energy Agency), particularly because "the IEA's membership is limited to OECD countries and that is seen as a lobby for fossil fuels" (Lesage, van de Graaf, and Westphal 2010). However, the choice of Abu Dhabi as the headquarters of the new organisation "resulted from an impressive UAE diplomatic lobbying campaign, especially aimed at African countries" (van de Graaf 2013, 24).

By helping countries to achieve their renewable energy potentials, IRENA envisions itself, as stated on its website, as "a powerful force in advancing the agenda of the widespread adoption and use of renewable energy, with the ultimate goal of safeguarding a sustainable future". In terms of energy transition discourse concerning Russia, such issues as opportunities for renewable energy as well as energy savings and energy efficiency are analysed and debated on the organisation's discussion platform.

The subsequent section will attempt to explore how two norms of the energy transition debate are reflected in the activities of the IGU and IRENA and whether they function differently in their respective institutional settings.

4. "Gas as a back-up fuel" and "reliability of supply" norms

This section focuses on the role of gas and renewables in the EU-Russian energy transition discourse by identifying dominant norms on which their shared interests are based. It analyses how the norms "gas as a back-up fuel for renewables" and "reliability of gas supply" are reflected in the agendas of two organisations and how they are converted into their daily activities.

The conducted interviews with energy experts who are representatives of the IGU and IRENA together with the existing policy documents of these organisations helped trace the input of the EU and Russia in the debate on the leading role of gas in the global low-carbon economy. The institutionalised context explains the IGU's advocacy functions in addition to questioning the presence of IRENA's support of these norms that are aimed at securing the prospects for gas in the future energy mix.

Further, based on the interviews conducted with the Dutch, Spanish and Russian energy experts who represent the IGU, this section attempts to answer the question of whether there is a clash of values and norms in the framework of cooperation between the EU and Russia within the IGU or whether there is a set of shared interests related to similar values and norms. These dominant norms are part of the energy transition debate in which the gas industry is actively engaged. Moreover, role of these norms in the EU-Russia energy cooperation is also analysed in the framework of IRENA in order to compare the normative positions of these organisations and find out whether the institutional setting makes a difference for competition and cooperation between gas and renewable energy industries. Besides the aforementioned norms, there are contested norms in the EU-Russia energy debate; for example, transparency, liberalisation of the European gas market, and gas as a foreign policy tool for Russia, which are collectively beyond the limits of this article.

4.1. "Gas as a back-up fuel for renewables" norm

As previously mentioned, the IGU positions itself as a global voice of the gas industry by advancing gas as a leading component of the future energy mix. The organisation advocates natural gas as the cleanest fossil fuel that can contribute to CO2 reduction targets. It constructs the image that the global gas industry and natural gas enable energy transition by fully adhering to the principles of the Paris COP 21 and the Paris Agreement. The IGU published case studies on improving urban air quality and positioned the coal to gas switch as "the fastest way to reduce CO2 and smog in cities" (IGU 2016). Also, the organisation has conducted a number of studies on the benefits of gas enabling a cleaner transport sector and the development of a renewable natural gas cycle.

The IGU's Executive Director M. Ydreos highlighted the role of his organisation in the following way:

> As the global voice of gas, the IGU seeks to improve the quality of life by advancing gas as a key contributor to a sustainable future … Natural gas provides the fastest and most economic path to less carbon intensive and cleaner air world. (Ydreos 2017)

The IGU believes that despite rapid deployment of renewable energies, fossil fuel market share will remain very large. In this context, gas is a "part of the long term sustainable energy solution" and a "destination fuel" (Bertran 2017, 35); however, there is a need to develop policy frameworks to support gas as a partner of renewable energy that will expedite its adoption.

The IGU has also been trying to address the sensitive environmental issue of methane leakage. The organisation highlights in its report that " … the industry is strongly committed to minimising its environmental footprint and tackling methane emissions is a key component of this commitment" (IGU 2017a, 7). In a number of policy papers, the IGU reiterates its key message about the need for gas to be a partner and transitional fuel to renewables. By featuring cases (of the IGU's member companies such as Enagas (Spain), SNAM (Italy), Gasunie (Netherlands), Gazprom (Russia) and many more) on minimising methane emission problems and participating in climate change mitigation, this report also proves the consistent application of the norm "gas as a back-up fuel for renewables" in the EU-Russian energy transition debate within the framework of the IGU.

In an interview with a senior energy expert of the IGU, it appears that the IGU has tried to side-line the role of politics and geopolitics while implementing its norm "gas as a back-up fuel for renewables".

> Here in the IGU we are avoiding discussing political issues … Geopolitics is a part of our playground but it's not what we would like to play. We are not guided by geopolitics. We are suffering from the scenarios that politicians have put but we are not creating them.[1]

The IGU is not focusing on geopolitical issues but is instead allowing Russia to host the LNG (liquefied natural gas) 2022 Conference in St. Petersburg during the US presidency of the union.[2]

The institutional setting of the IGU does make a difference in regard to cooperation versus competition within a gas industry. A Russian energy expert from Gazprom Representative Office in Belgium who worked at various IGU committees during 2009–2014 shared his impression about the IGU. When he joined the LNG committee of the IGU, he

> was surprised to a certain extent that companies are ready to share their know-how and best practices despite existing commercial secrets. The spirit of healthy cooperation is indeed present in the organization because it works on the voluntary basis, and companies are willing to share their expertise.[3]

This spirit of cooperation between the gas industry representatives in the institutionalised setting of the IGU is not based only on the beneficial exchange of best practices but also on market solidarity. According to the Honorary energy expert of the International Gas Union,

> Within the gas industry there is a market-based view of solidarity. Because if you have no security of supply, you will lose the market. So, that has nothing to do with politics, but with competition versus oil and coal, and nowadays versus other sources of energy.[4]

Therefore, in order to implement the norm "gas as a back-up fuel for renewables", it is important for the gas industry to de-politicise their activities and promote cooperation and solidarity rather than competition within the industry, so that the role of natural gas can be secured in the energy transition process. In pursuance of guaranteeing its role in the future energy mix, the gas industry needs to address the challenges of reducing environmental footprints (such as methane emissions) and reduce costs of production, secure investments and create new markets by further focusing on new technologies and innovation. The IGU does realise that "greater and more effective advocacy is needed to raise the voice of gas" in order to convince the international society that "new sources of natural gas from conventional and unconventional deposits, in combination with new and existing pipelines, and the rapid growth of LNG infrastructure" (IGU 2017b, 3) will significantly enhance the security of supply, flexibility and affordability of gas.

4.2. "Reliability of gas supply" norm

Figuratively speaking, the "reliability of gas supply" norm dwells in the heart of the gas industry. There are two dimensions of identifying this norm in the EU-Russian energy transition debate: environmental- and market- based.

The environmental dimension of this norm is positioned against the vulnerability of renewable energy sources. By pronouncing the existential need of gas as a back-up source for fluctuating renewable power produced by wind and the sun, words create reality and consequently a new meaning is produced in the backdrop of energy transition discourse that is necessary for securing industry survival. If the IGU sends a message that gas is a reliable, sustainable, affordable fuel that is cleaner than coal and oil and always accessible due to the gas storage capacities (unlike the renewable energy), the demand for gas should grow, and it will grow.

The IGU proposes a solution to the intermittency problem of renewables which, unlike gas, cannot currently be stored or be constantly available for conversion into electricity. The organisation advocates that gas can be a solution to this

> challenge of seasonal and daily output variability of wind, solar, and hydro generation. Distributed natural gas-based energy systems can be integrated with renewable thermal and electric generating systems to offer clean, efficient, and reliable hybrid systems. The natural gas infrastructure can also act as a storage medium for renewably generated hydrogen, or synthetic natural gas. (IGU 2017b, 19)

The IGU uses a pragmatic logic by not directly mentioning the weak points of the deployment of renewable energy such as storage problems and high costs of solar and wind power in its statements but instead addresses them in a problem-solving manner. In conclusion, the IGU is successful in affiliating the gas industry to the "sustainability camp" by providing convincing arguments for the fact that gas is needed for at least the next 30 years in order to support the energy transition and it is coal, not gas that is the most polluting fossil fuel that needs to be phased out.

The market-based dimension of the norm "reliability of gas supply" in the EU-Russia energy transition debate is illustrated in the excerpts from the interviews conducted with the IGU energy experts. In the author's interview with an Honorary energy expert of the IGU, he emphasised that the security of supply is of fundamental importance for the gas market as a whole; otherwise, the supplier could lose its market share. He also mentioned the EU-Russia negotiations right after the first Russia-Ukraine gas dispute in 2006:[5]

> And I told my Gazprom colleagues: "Be aware that if you turn the lock off and break the gas stream to Europe that could hurt Europe for a short time but for a long time it would hurt you. Because then we know that you are not a reliable supplier". And, I think, that`s understood very well by, I would say, each gas executive in Europe, including Russia. Everyone knows that if the reliability of supply is being compromised, then that party is out. That would not be immediate but in a medium and long term they would have much more damage for themselves than the party which they tried to hurt.[6] …

As D. Fickling concludes, "Over the past decade, natural gas has somehow managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory … The industry is in a deep crisis … Reliability is the attribute that variable wind and solar lack" (Fickling 2017). Nevertheless, the IGU does not use the words "crisis", "failure" or "defeat". Instead, the IGU's leadership talks about transitional times for the industry:

> We are clearly in the transition. We are improving the performance … by increasing gas as a part of energy mix. The fastest way to reduce CO2 emissions is to switch coal to gas. That is the first thing that everyone understands … [7]

As previously mentioned, the IGU's leadership underlines the affordable price of gas versus expensive renewables in reports, official presentations, mass media messages and interviews:

> Gas is available at the international market. And the cost is also reducing and reducing. So, you can have easy access to gas. The other source of energy could be renewable. And renewable is also available but at the expensive price. So that is the question … [8]

The following subsection of this article will analyse how the norms "gas a back-up fuel for renewables" and "reliability of gas supply" are reflected in the EU-Russia energy transition debate in the framework of IRENA. This IGO advocates energy efficiency, innovative low-carbon solutions and the mitigation of greenhouse green emissions by adhering to the Paris agreement. In its reports, IRENA is more sceptical about the role of gas as it is still a polluting fossil fuel stating that "Gas remains incompatible with the required levels of decarbonisation. As a result, significant gas stranding upstream and in gas-fired powered generation are seen" (IRENA 2017c, 26)

However, it should be considered that gas industry lobby is strong and does present solid competition for the renewables. There are evidently competing messages that the IGU (increase the use of gas) and IRENA (increase the use of renewables) are promoting. IRENA is focusing on revealing "the true costs of fossil fuels" and depicts a dramatic future by emphasising "the risks of irreversible, catastrophic consequences of human-induced global warming" (Gielen, Boshell, and Saygin 2016, 117).

In terms of the EU-Russia energy transition debate, the Russian government's potential to pursue a renewable energy agenda is rather limited as Russia needs to catch up with the EU's leading positions as a norm-maker in energy transition. A report on the Renewable Energy Prospects for the Russian Federation concludes that "the reduction in domestic consumption of oil and gas that results from the deployment of more renewables can also create the potential for increasing oil and gas exports" (REMAP 2030, 2017a, 20). Nevertheless, there are prospects in producing renewable energy equipment domestically in Russia, since "with more production capacity, Russia can become a competitive exporter of renewable energy equipment" (REMAP 2030, 2017a, 21). In 2017, the share of renewables in the energy mix of the Russian Federation was 3%, and IRENA estimates that it can be increased to 11% by 2030; although, the current governmental target for 2030 is set only at around 5% (IRENA 2017b).

Besides using bioenergy and large hydropower, Russia has one of the highest wind potentials in the world and is already cooperating with the EU in the field of deployment of wind technologies. In 2017, Russian nuclear power energy company Rosatom and the Dutch turbine developer Lagerwey founded a joint venture called Red Wind in order to supply 388 wind turbines to Russia in the next five years. The Dutch manufacturer will be responsible for technology transfer and expertise in operating the wind farms (Richard 2017).

Following this agreement, in February 2018, JSC VetroOGK, which is part of the management company JSC NovaWind (a division of Rosatom), started to construct wind farms with a total capacity of up to 600 MW in Southern Russia (Rosatom 2018). This exemplifies the fact that renewable energy does lead to increased regional cooperation and involves more decentralised actors in the energy transition process.

In the past, the geopolitics of energy has focused on fossil fuels, notably oil and gas, and in recent years the geopolitics of renewables driven by non-state actors has received more scholarly attention (O'Sullivan, Overland, and Sandalow 2017, 2). As the world's platform for renewable energy cooperation, IRENA is uniquely positioned to unite governments, industries, civil societies and individuals to identify ways to accelerate and expand the decarbonisation of the global economy. IRENA demonstrates a strong interest in geopolitics through the establishment of the *Global Commission on the Geopolitics of Energy Transformation* in 2018. In particular, members of governments from countries such as the UAE, Germany, Norway, the Russian Federation, the USA, Saudi Arabia, China and Brazil are actively involved (IRENA 2018a).

The main objective of this initiative is to analyse how energy transition impacts global and national political dynamics. For example, it will focus on how the renewables will transform geopolitics, on cross-border energy trade and energy democratisation when countries can become more self-sufficient and not dependent on imports of fossil fuels as well as more competitive in the development of innovative technologies of renewables. The *Global Commission on the Geopolitics of Energy Transformation* will analyse the

decentralisation process of energy supplies that will increase the role of cities and regions and the geopolitics of electric cars and grid politics due to the vast data collected as a result of their increased usage (IRENA 2018b).

The EU-Russia energy transition debate in the framework of IRENA, and in particular, the "reliability of gas supply" norm is clearly addressed in geopolitical terms in the Commission's report issued in January 2019:

> It is not just the energy resources themselves which have been the object of geopolitical competition, but also their transit routes. … For more than a decade, the EU has supported the construction of a Southern Gas Corridor to reduce its reliance on Russian gas, while both Russia and some European countries have promoted alternative gas corridors, such as Nord Stream, to circumvent existing transit routes. (IRENA 2019)

To sum up this section, there is no clash of values and norms in the framework of the EU and Russian relations in the IGU. As it is demonstrated by their cooperation and absence of competition in the institutionalised setting, there is a set of shared interests in relation to similar values and norms. At present, Russia's strategic task as the world's leading gas and oil exporter is to act as a norm-setter in the global natural gas market and secure a role for natural gas in the future energy mix. It is, undoubtedly, crucial for the country's revenues and trade balance.

Noticeably, cooperation between the EU and the Russian Federation in the field of renewables is currently less developed than in the field of fossil fuels. In particular, the EU has only started in recent years to provide technology transfer of renewables to Russia, while technology transfer in oil and gas has been running for decades. However, the Russian oil and gas industry has been affected by American and European sanctions since the 2014 conflict between Russia and Ukraine. It can be foreseen that the growing renewables-led energy transformation will be shaping national energy policies in the future, including gas and oil rich Russia, and will present new geopolitical challenges for all state and non-state actors involved.

This article establishes that there are shared interests in relation to similar values and norms which explain the attempts to de-politicise the gas supply that is essential to the survival of the global gas industry. As the empirical evidence demonstrates, these shared interests are not possible (if one looks through the lenses of the social constructivist theoretical approach as the author of this article does) without shared values and norms on which the interests are based. The element of the de-politicisation of the gas supply is rooted in the "business only" practices of the IGU members; in particular, their shared norms of "gas as a back-up fuel" and "reliability of supply".

In other words, the institutionalised context (in this case, the IGU as an international non-governmental organisation) allows for shared interests that are based on similar norms and values. Beyond this particular non-governmental institutional setting (for example in IRENA that consists of governments as its members), we can observe the process of politicisation of the energy transition debate with its focus on the geopolitics of renewables and energy transformation that is based on competing interests, norms and values.

5. Implementation of norms – debate on the Nord Stream 2

This section has sought to explain how the above discussed norms of "gas as a back-up fuel for renewables" and "reliability of supply" have been implemented in the concrete project of cooperation between Russian and the EU energy companies, namely the

construction of Nord Stream 2. A new gas pipeline is scheduled to be in operation by the end of 2019 and will connect Russia's Narva Bay to a location near Greifswald in Germany by going under the Baltic Sea and passing through the exclusive economic zones of Finland, Sweden and Denmark (see Figure 2).

The European and Russian gas industries have worked intensively on de-politicising their cooperation, as they see not only commercial benefits but also, as members of the IGU, perceive it as an opportunity to promote its agenda in staying united for the sake of survival, especially in the face of the challenges presented by global energy transition process and uncertain gas demand in the future. From the point of view of five European companies, namely Uniper and Wintershall (Germany), Royal Dutch Shell (Netherlands & UK), OMV (Austria) and ENGIE (France) that are involved in the construction of Nord Stream 2 together with Gazprom, this project is exclusively a point of joint commercial interests and does not reflect political or geopolitical motives. The incentives for cooperation with Gazprom for these companies are purely profit-driven. In their joint narrative, the companies mention gas as a partner for renewables and the need to withstand competition from gas suppliers in the US and Asia as the domestic gas production in Europe is declining (faster than it was earlier predicted) and consequently the demand for energy is increasing. It was stated in the joint press release of the three participating energy companies that, "Nord Stream 2 has now contracted several billion euros' worth of supplies and services on the basis of valid laws. These are private sector investments in Europe's energy security, without any subsidies from the European Union: demand-oriented and market-based" (Uniper 2018). It is estimated that this project will contribute to the creation of more than 30,000 jobs over the period of five years and "the total economic benefit created as of July 2017 for the European Union, which is receiving 59% of total investments, is over €5.15 billion" (Kruse and Berkhahn 2017, 4).

Figure 2. Gas pipelines in Europe. Source: Deutsche Welle. http://www.dw.com/en/merkel-casts-doubt-on-nord-stream-2-gas-pipeline/a-43328058.

From the participating energy companies and their respective governments' perspectives, if the construction of Nord Stream 2 were to be blocked, the reliability of the gas supply to Western Europe would be jeopardised. Ukraine's gas transport system is considered as an unreliable gas route due to the history of the Russia-Ukraine gas conflicts in 2006 and 2009 and the continual disagreements between Gazprom and Ukraine's state company Naftogaz. After winning two gas arbitration cases in the Stockholm arbitration tribunal in February 2018, Naftogaz expects a net payment of $2.56 billion from Gazprom. Moreover, since the end of May 2018, Naftogaz has been attempting to recover this amount of money from Gazprom's assets in Switzerland and "has taken action to freeze the assets of the Nord Stream 2 (NS2) pipeline subsidiary of Gazprom" (Smedley 2018). In May 2018, the Swiss authorities issued a freezing order to Nord Stream 2 AG "in respect to claims of debts against Gazprom" (Smedley 2018). The struggle prevailed as Ukraine perceived the Nord Stream 2 project to be an element of a hybrid war and as "a strategic energy union between Germany, Russia and Austria regarding redistribution of European energy markets" (Dombrovskyy 2018). Ukraine will lose $3 billion annually, which corresponds to 3% of its GDP; thus, Naftogaz developed a so-called plan B in case of gas transit termination in 2019. The company filed a new arbitration claim demanding $12 billion as compensation for damage if the capacities of the Ukrainian gas transport system are not used after the construction of Nord Stream 2 (Liga. Business. 2018). There is also the option of existing gas tariff revisions, however, the questions remain as to whether Naftogaz initiatives are in fact implementable or not.

The US government also regards Nord Stream 2 as controversial, not only commercially but also geopolitically, since it has the interest of its energy companies in mind and is striving for its gas market share in the EU. The Trump administration is considering imposing sanctions on European gas companies participating in the contested project. It would be difficult for the American LNG to compete in the EU with much cheaper and subsidised Russian gas in the future if Nord Stream 2 were to be launched. Moreover, American top governmental officials, including the National Security Advisor John Bolton, "see the project as a threat to the United States and European security and are determined to stop it" (Gramer, Johnson, and De Luce 2018). Germany's Economy Minister Peter Altmaier accused the US government of pursuing its economic interests (namely, increasing American shale gas exports to Europe) and pushing the America First agenda in trying to block the Nord Stream 2 project (Natural Gas News 2018). However, it is clear that it would be more difficult for the expensive American shale gas to compete with the subsidised Russian gas transported via pipelines directly to the EU.

Furthermore, if in addition to Nord Stream 1, Nord Stream 2 is constructed, Germany will become a new gas hub in Europe as well as the Netherlands (the Groningen field) which will for at least the next decade continue positioning itself as a Europe's gas roundabout. The Dutch government has plans to gradually cut the production of gas in the Groningen field (which belongs to the top 10 largest gas fields in the world) due to the ever-increasing number of earthquakes in the province of Groningen. Therefore, the participation of Royal Dutch Shell in Nord Stream 2 as well as continued operations of N.V. Nederlandse Gasunie and Gasterra (based in Groningen) is crucial in sustaining the role of the Netherlands as a leading country in gas export.

The idea of Nord Stream 2 to bypass Ukraine and Poland as transit countries has also interfered with the Poland's ambitions to become a regional player in the gas supply

diversifications projects in Central and Eastern Europe. The Nord Stream 2 project also impedes Polish ambitions to become a regional gas distribution centre via its Świnoujście LNG terminal that opened in 2015. Polish authorities had high expectations of this investment as it would enable "overland gas re-export to neighbouring countries like Slovakia, Czech Republic, and Ukraine" and would allow "for the diversification of supply sources and contribute to lower gas prices in the region" (Mlynarski 2016).

Poland's plans to establish a gas hub in Eastern Europe were dictated by the need to spread gas supplies away from the Russian gas monopolist Gazprom that had exclusive access to the Soviet gas transportation system and infrastructure in the Baltic States, Poland, Bulgaria, Ukraine, etc. Slovakia is also opposing Nord Stream 2 as it will lose significant state budget revenues from the absence of the transit of Russian gas via Ukraine which will be affected the most as the largest Russian gas transit country.

Thus, the main actors of the re-politicisation of the EU gas supplies that will lose potential gas revenues from the construction of the Nord Stream 2 are Poland and the Baltic States (which already import American LNG in order to avoid being exclusively dependent on Russian gas), as well as Slovakia, Ukraine and the United States. Western European gas companies and Gazprom are trying to keep the project de-politicised as it is in their interests to construct Nord Stream 2 and profit from its implementation.

6. Conclusion

Considering the publicly available policy documents and the interviews conducted with representatives of the IGU from the Netherlands, Spain and Russia, it can be concluded that cooperation based on a set of shared interests in relation to similar values and norms triumphs competition between the members of gas industries within this organisation. Common goals such as guaranteeing the future growth of global gas demands, securing financial support in investments for the development of innovative technologies in the gas industry and the promotion of complementary natural gas and renewable energy systems surpass the likelihoods of presenting a clash of values and norms between the EU and Russia. However, when the norms discussed in this article ("gas as a back-up fuel for renewable" and "reliability of gas supply") are implemented in a concrete project such as Nord Stream 2, it becomes clear that geopolitical constraints and competing commercial interests do influence the united "voice of gas industry" (IGU 2012, 12).

The gas industry in Western Europe, which needs Gazprom (considered to be a reliable supplier since the Soviet times), is striving to de-politicise Russian export since otherwise gas cannot be used as a back-up fuel for renewables. Both gas pipelines and LNG terminals show the application of the "reliability of supply" norm. This norm can be promoted through a unified position by the international gas industry in overcoming the challenges of the energy transition process.

Nord Stream 2 is an example of process tracing which involves actors and structures, in which who is talking is determined by the structure – the IGU or IRENA. The latter demonstrates a return to geopolitics characterised by a debate in national terms, i.e. sovereignty, while in the former, Nord Stream 2 is discussed in market terms, thus avoiding geopolitics. Given the different nature of these organisations (intergovernmental versus non-governmental), it was expected that the issue of the Nord Stream 2 construction would be discussed in different ways in IRENA and the IGU.

If a new case were to arise, it can be expected that the process will continue to follow the logic of the structure. This structure defines how norms are inherent to it and how they are reflected in procedures and rules; therefore, it becomes possible to predict the actors' future behavioural patterns (for example, international energy organisations). This is a test of how the given structure – the IGU or IRENA – can fulfil the expectations of a specific behaviour of the actors within this structure.

It was anticipated that in the intergovernmental organisation lobbying, economic discourse, sovereignty debate and geopolitics would take place, whereas in the non-governmental organisation a commercial, market and industry discourse would prevail. An institutional choice for specific types of actors plays a crucial role in the contents of the discourse. The constitutional structure of the organisation determines who can be a member; however, the characteristics of these members (industries or government representatives) determine the dominant discourse. In terms of constructivist analysis, industries "talk" production, money and market, while governments "talk" sovereignty and state interests.

Relating this energy transition discourse to a broader debate on climate change, not only the governments of the countries that are lacking oil and gas reserves need to develop the renewables but also those countries with an abundance of fossil fuels, in order to achieve the climate targets of the Paris Agreement. By setting higher climate targets and increasing the proportion of renewables in relation to the existing usage of fossil fuels, some oil-rich countries have started to implement reforms in their electricity sectors by, for example, introducing electric vehicles and developing innovative techniques in energy digitalisation and storage.

The natural gas industry is on a mission to survive in a renewable energy future; therefore, it is in the energy companies' interest, whether they are European, Russian or American, to implement and promote the norms of "gas as a back-up fuel for renewables" and "reliability of supply". However, different commercial interests affect this goal and create economic rivalry between the representatives of gas industries, which also undermines the "reliability of gas supply" norm in the energy transition debate.

If the gas industry is unable to overcome the geopolitical constraints and continues to dispute projects such as Nord Stream 2, it will not be able to challenge the position of the renewables industry and secure its spot in the international decarbonisation agenda. The gas industry needs to contribute efficiently to the implementation of the "reliability of gas supply" norm and promote gas as a solution to the intermittency problem of renewables. While the renewables industries are busy working on solving their energy storage problem (in particular the uneven peak production hours that are dependent on the available sunlight or the amount of wind or rainfall), the gas industry can emphasise the advantages of the availability and sustainability of the gas energy supply.

Thus, if the relationship between Russia and the EU is to be improved, policy-makers should focus on less state-centric cooperation and involve more non-state actors. The states that are members of IRENA have the obligation to guarantee the security of energy supplies to their citizens and as sovereign actors, this is done from a sovereignty-based geopolitical point of view. The industry as in case of the IGU applies the market logic. It is in the interest of the gas producers to ensure the security of supply to their customers. Hence, including non-governmental organisations in solving crisis situations could provide better results for restoring trade and energy cooperation rather than relying only on interstate relations in traditional geopolitical terms.

Notes

1. Author's interview with Senior energy expert, IGU headquarters (12 September 2017, Barcelona, Spain).
2. According to the IGU's website "The world's most important liquefied natural gas conference will be held in St. Petersburg, Russia in the spring of 2022. The event is considered to be the world's premier LNG conference, attracting high level delegates that include energy ministers, CEOs, civil society and academia from all over the world … . The Steering Committee's decision to hold LNG 2022 in Russia reflected the international gas industry's esteem for Russia as an important and growing exporter of LNG". https://www.igu.org/news/russia-host-world%E2%80%99s-largest-lng-conference-2022.
3. Author's interview with Russian energy expert, Gazprom Representative Office in the Kingdom of Belgium, (12 February 2018, Brussels, Belgium), translated from Russian: "В некоторой степени, когда я начал участвовать, то даже удивился, как компании готовы делиться своими ноу-хау, своими технологиями, несмотря на какие-то коммерческие тайны … Потом скажу, что вот здесь, дух такого здорового сотрудничества присутствует в организации. Поскольку действует на добровольных основах, и компании хотят делиться своими ноу-хау. Ну, что касается такого сотрудничества, то оно присутствует."
4. Author's interview with Honorary energy expert of the International Gas Union (10 July 2017, Groningen, the Netherlands).
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Author's interview with Senior energy expert, IGU headquarters (12 September 2017, Barcelona, Spain).
8. Ibid.

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2. Honorary energy expert, International Gas Union (IGU), Groningen, the Netherlands, 10 July 2017.
3. Senior Programme Officer, IRENA, Groningen, the Netherlands, 24 August 2017.
4. Senior energy expert, IGU headquarters, Barcelona, Spain, 12 September 2017.

5. Energy expert, Gazprom Representative Office in the Kingdom of Belgium, Brussels, Belgium, 12 February 2018.
6. Former Policy Officer, IRENA, skype interview, 15 February 2018.

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